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# RUDYARD KIPLING

By BONAMY DOBRÉE

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Bonamy Dobrée, who is professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds, is one of the most eminent critics and historians of literature in Great Britain. Before making creative criticism his life work, Professor Dobrée was educated and trained as a professional soldier and fought with distinction in France and the Middle East throughout the 1914-18 war. He also served from 1939-45.

Much of Professor Dobrée's best known work has been associated with the drama and authors of the eighteenth and late seventeenth century, such as his *Restoration Comedy* (1926), or his authoritative edition of Lord Chesterfield's letters (1930). His books, however, have dealt with a wide range of literary subjects including contemporary writers, as in his *Modern Prose Style* (1934, 1950); while biographies such as *William Penn* (1932) and historical studies such as *The Floating Republic* (with C. E. Manwaring, 1935) have shown his sympathy with men of action and affairs. These are qualities which make his commentary on Kipling and the point of view expressed through Kipling's characters of special interest.

Professor Dobrée was born in 1891, was educated at Haileybury and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. After serving in the first world war he went to Cambridge and took his degree in 1921. In 1925 he became a Lecturer at London University and from 1926 to 1929 was Professor of English at the Egyptian University, Cairo. In 1936 he became Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds, and was made honorary *Doctem de Dijon* in 1949. He is the author of some twenty books, a well-known broadcaster and a contributor to the best known literary periodicals during the last twenty-five years. This essay on Kipling is developed from an article that originally appeared in the *Criterion*—the quarterly magazine formerly edited by T. S. Eliot—and reprinted in *The Lamp and the Lute* (1929).



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GENERAL EDITOR

T. O. Beachcroft





RUDYARD KIPLING  
*from a drawing by WILLIAM STRANG in the National Portrait  
Gallery*

*R. Chén*

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# RUDYARD KIPLING

## Part I

### THE MAN

#### I

IT is no use talking about a man's work without trying to set out what his main intuitions would seem to be, what he thinks life is 'about'. If he is a serious artist, his work will all the time be concerned with this; it is even perhaps in doing his work, in reporting (as an artist all the while does) what happens to him as he experiences life, that he finds out the answer to the question Kipling once put to himself, 'What am I trying to get at?' With Kipling the attempt must be made at the outset, since his symbols were more than normally accidental, the result of circumstances and the time he was born in. Thus it is easy to misunderstand him. He was not, as used to be generally thought, a crude British imperialist, a jingo, cruel and arrogant, a thumper of banjo melodies. There is perhaps a whiff of these here and there in his work: but his importance resides in the fact that, as M. André Maurois has said, he had 'a permanent, natural contact, with the oldest and deepest layers of human consciousness'.

Perhaps the most profound intuition that possessed Kipling was that of the loneliness of the individual. Again and again story or poem is written around that theme. We find it at least as early as *Life's Handicap*, in the story 'Without Benefit of Clergy': '... the human soul is a very lonely thing, and when it is getting ready to go away, hides itself in a misty borderland where the living may not follow.' This sense, or knowledge of isolation, is not unusual; what is striking is the intensity and the constancy with which he felt it. It was born in the bitter experience of his childhood at Southsea, where, sent home from India by his parents, he fell into the clutches of a woman who wielded evangelical Christianity as an instrument of torture. It was pitiless hell

for a boy of from six to twelve filled with despair because he felt deserted by his parents : and in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*, published late in life, he revealed that the painfully harsh story ' Baa, baa, black sheep ' told in the *Wee Willie Winkie* volume of 1892, was about himself. The experience, he said, drained him of any capacity for real, personal hate, for the rest of his days. Of personal hate, yes ; but not of hatred for what he conceived to be evil.

If this suffering taught him that man was a lonely creature—he came indeed to like the condition, to hanker too much after privacy—what did it teach him about what man had to live by ? No one, of course, could pretend that Kipling emerged from the ordeal fully made ; nevertheless there are certain characteristics he displayed which seem to have arisen directly from these terrible years at Southsea. Most important, perhaps, was his conviction that what matters about a man is not what he feels, but what he does. Action is the remedy for unhappiness, and in the first part of *The Light that Failed*, where the picture of his exiled childhood is again drawn, Maisie says to Dick in their misery, ' Let's find things to do, and forget things '. This intuition deepened in metaphysical content ; for instance in the story ' Below the Mill Dam ' (*Traffics and Discoveries*), the Waters say to the Wheel :

If you thought a trifle more about the work you're supposed to do, and a trifle less about your precious feelings, you'd render a little more duty in return for the power vested in you . . .

and to this idea we shall come back.

It will be clear that such a view of the insignificance of the personal emotions was bound to make him unpopular with fashionable ' highbrow ' readers of the first half of this century, among whom the emphasis, as, say in E. M. Forster, or Marcel Proust, or Virginia Woolf, was precisely on the delicate sensations, the personal relation. But if the child Rudyard had thought of his feelings, how should he have survived ? A small boy, naturally, cannot work out for

himself a whole philosophy of life ; yet the early need to be himself, to stand on his own feet, endowed Kipling with an assurance which gave his first works a sense of precocious finality.

His ancestry may help us further to account in some degree for the themes or materials which continually recur in his work. His father, Lockwood Kipling, was a learned and cultivated man, curator of the Museum at Lahore, and himself an artist. His mother was the eldest of a group of very beautiful and intelligent women, two of whom married other artists—Burne-Jones and Poynter—and the third of whom became the mother of Stanley Baldwin, future Prime Minister of England. Further—and this is important—like his own Aurelian McCoggin, in the story of that name (*Plain Tales*) ‘his grandfathers on both sides had been Wesleyan preachers, and the preaching strain came out in his mind’. Aurelian was a militant Spencerian-Comtist atheist, but what was it that Kipling wanted to preach when the strain insisted on coming out in his mind ? Not, certainly, Evangelicalism, for his very early days in India had familiarized him with all sorts of religions, and the years in the little house at Southsea had given him a holy hatred of any kind of hell-preaching Christianity, a hatred he never lost. Even in the mature volume *Actions and Reactions*, in the brilliantly prophetic story of air traffic in the year 2000, he refers to ‘the men of the old days, each one of them taught (*that is the horror of it !*) that after death he would very possibly go for ever to unspeakable torment’. But Kipling was always tender to those of any religion who needed the support of faith, and it is characteristic of him to have written in *The Five Nations* :

O ye who tread the Narrow Way  
By Tophet-flare to Judgment Day,  
Be gentle when ‘the heathen’ pray  
To Buddha at Kamakura. . . .

and in the Preface to *Life's Handicap* that ‘when men come to the gates of death, all religions seem to them wonderfully



alike, and colourless'. What then did he live by? A curious religion of his own, which probably most nearly approaches that Stoicism which was the religion of the Victorian Public School.

## 2

Not that Kipling had a system: he was not primarily a philosopher, but an artist, with the intuitions of the artist, which varied as his experience deepened, and were to some extent prompted by the mood of the moment. For though his was a complex personality, his impulse as a writer came from a great zest in life, life which 'is curious—and sudden—and mixed'. It is full of unpredictable and often enchanting surprises, and for sheer inventiveness, fact outdoes fiction. 'Ah what', he cries, in 'The Benefactors', parodying a well-known poem of Landor's,

*Ah! what avails the classic bent  
And what the cultured word,  
Against the undoctored incident  
That actually occurred?*

*And what is Art whereto we press  
Through paint and prose and rhyme—  
When Nature in her nakedness  
Defeats us every time?*

What happens, then, is entrancing, and moreover people are inexhaustibly fascinating. Nevertheless the sheer delight the artist feels before the pageant of life is rarely by itself enough, and the moralist in Kipling comes out when he seeks the spring of men's actions, as the Stoic mystic emerges when he attempts to answer the 'why' of the process of existence. To the philosopher, Kipling's solution will appear a strange mixture of predestination and will, or of nihilism opposed by the will, and of eternal recurrence tempered by slow change. All the time Kipling asks the questions: What is it that makes living possible once romanticism (an important element) fails to satisfy? What

is it that enables man to outface an indifferent universe? and how much can a man endure? Finally, perhaps, there is the question implicit in so much of what he wrote: What is the law to which man must adhere?

Perhaps it would be as well, in this brief survey, to look first at this last query, since the phrase has been so much misunderstood, is indeed, we may think, too vague to understand. Its most notorious use is in 'Recessional', the hymn where he rebukes the British Empire, and refers to 'the lesser breeds without the law'. There is, of course, the simple law we meet in the *Jungle Books*; but even in those volumes another dimension shows itself in the story of Purun Bhagat, who had been a great statesman, and was going into retirement to meditate, as an ageing Hindu will. At Simla, where he appears as a beggar, a Mahomedan policeman tells him to move on: 'and Purun Bhagat salaamed reverently to the Law, because he knew the value of it, and was seeking for a Law of his own.' The most interesting reference of all occurs in the brilliant, partly enigmatic story in his last book, *Limits and Renewals*, the one which brings in St. Paul, and is named 'The Manner of Men'. Sulinor, who had been with St. Paul when they undergirt the ship, is speaking:

'But, as I was saying, once in the Fleet nowadays one is a Roman with authority—no waiting twenty years for your papers. And Paul said to me: "Serve Cæsar. You are not canvas I can cut to advantage at present. But if you serve Cæsar you will be obeying at least some sort of law." He talked as though I were a barbarian.'

The law, then, it would seem, is that frame within which man can work if he is to fulfil himself. As he declared in *The Light that Failed*, 'Only the free are bond; only the bond are free'.

For Kipling, moreover, the Law by which man lives, whether the law of his religion, of his tribe, of his craft, is always a law which demands of a man the total surrender of himself. Abnegation, self-sacrifice, doing whatever it is

that one has to do without thought of reward, that is the human quality which (at one time at least) Kipling most admired. It is for that reason he is so humble before subalterns in India, or Centurions on the Roman Wall in Britain, before District Commissioners, and doctors who make discoveries with no thought of recognition. He admired the British Empire—in so far as at any moment it deserved his admiration—because it gave men, and women, the opportunity for developing this quality of giving oneself. What he loved was carelessness of self, recklessness even ; and he praised men who will risk their souls to keep faith, either with their fellow humans or with their craft or job. The theme occurs early, but it was one which Kipling never lost hold of, and it became subtilized both in feeling and in expression. Two extracts from *Limits and Renewals* will perhaps illustrate the way in which the intuition grew to be merged in the sense of life as it comes to men to live it. The first is from the story 'The Tender Achilles', in which a brilliant surgeon, strained beyond endurance by having to do hurried and second-rate work at the battle front, is saved from collapse. He is brought back to an illuminating piece of research which he alone can perform. The two friends who undertake his cure are talking, and one of them says :

' . . . I told him we were all alike, and the conditions of our job hadn't been human. I said there were limits to the machine. We were forced to go beyond 'em, and we ought to be thankful to be able to do as much as we had. Then he wrung his hands and said, "To whom much has been given, from the same much shall be required". That annoyed me. I hate bookkeeping with God ! It's dam' insolence, anyhow.'

No, there shall be no book-keeping with God ; a man must give everything freely, even self, though he may hope that God will give him back himself. Or so St. Paul said in that remarkable poem in the same book, 'At his Execution', of which the last two stanzas read :

Since I was overcome  
By that great Light and Word,



I have forgot or foregone  
 The self men call their own  
 (Being made all things to all men)  
 So that I might save some  
 At such small price, to the Lord,  
 As being all things to all men.

I was made all things to all men,  
 But now my course is done—  
 And now is my reward—  
 Ah, Christ, when I stand at Thy Throne  
 With those I have drawn to the Lord,  
 Restore me my self again !

## 3

Should you ask to what end all this self-abnegation, the answer is not so clear, and it is here that we meet Kipling's *mystique*. In some ways what we might call his religion is best exhibited in the story 'The Children of the Zodiac' (*Many Inventions*) where he tells us of the need of work or love or laughter to cure the fear of death, and of the need to despise pain. Beyond this morality lies the metaphysic of existence, and in this respect Kipling is almost wholly a late Victorian. His sense of the divine is much Matthew Arnold's, his blood-mysticism not unlike Meredith's, his feeling that man moves in an indifferent universe an echo of Hardy's vision. It is partly a Hardyan terror in which, as he wrote in 'The Supports' (*Debits and Credits*)

Hearts may fail and Strength outwear, and Purpose turn to loathing,

But the everyday affair of business, meals and clothing,  
 Builds a bulkhead 'twixt Despair and the Edge of Nothing ;

and partly a Browning-like sense of the need to work, a sense expressed in the Envoy to *Life's Handicap*, that

One instant's toil to Thee denied  
 Stands all Eternity's offence,

which drive him to labour. Even though Kipling could inveigh against 'indecent restlessness', and had his moments



of Horatian quiet, you feel that it is not only immense gusto, but also terror of the void, that urges him to use his power. But then comes the question : To what end is man given power ? For what was power vested in the mill-wheel ? Surely, as with Weland's sword (*Puck of Pook's Hill*),

It is not given  
For goods or gear  
But for the Thing.

It is our turn then to ask : What is the Thing ?

And here it is that we come upon one of the most difficult points to determine when thinking about Kipling. (He was an artist, we must repeat, not a philosopher, and his attitude towards existence was intuitively felt, and expressed in symbols, perhaps almost unconsciously. The Thing seems to be a vaguely apprehended 'life-process', of which we are an obscure part : it is something developing, perhaps, in Tennyson's phrase, a sense of 'some far-off divine event To which the whole creation moves'. It is this process of which man is guardian, and the development of which he must serve ; for Kipling was no reactionary conservative. His philosophy was one of change, and that is why he welcomed all the inventions of his time, was the first man to write imaginatively about machinery, motor-cars, wireless, aeroplanes, and to use them with a schoolboy delight.

Yet it is only in their proper appointed time that these things must come. There is more than one story to illustrate this theme, the most notable being 'The Eye of Allah' in *Debits and Credits*. There the microscope, discovered in the lifetime of Roger Bacon, and so some centuries before its time, has to be destroyed. Throughout the ages the anonymous premature inventor dies despised and 'wholly confounded' : and, as the prefatory poem tells us :

More to be pitied than he are the wise  
Souls which foresaw the evil of loosing  
Knowledge or Art before time, and aborted  
Noble devices and deep-wrought healings,  
Lest offence should arise

Heaven delivers on earth the Hour that cannot be thwarted  
Neither advanced . . .

Perhaps this is no more than a recognition of the fact that all progress is made by small and painful steps, and that only a number of happy circumstances brings any matter to successful birth. But a deep intuition of progress is superbly expressed in the poem that follows the story, one of those curious, and usually very successful, 'translations' of Horace Odes that Horace never lived to write. He says—referring to the Pollio eclogue :

. . . so Virgil died,  
Aware of change at hand, and prophesied

Change upon all the Eternal Gods had made  
And on the Gods alike  
Fated as dawn but, as the dawn, delayed  
Till the just hour should strike—

So Kipling, feeling the world to be on the verge of vast new changes, prophesied new world governments, new world outlooks, all the time vaguely searching for a new Law.

There is one further peculiarity about the process : it does not seem to be directed towards the things which man strives for, about which there is all the clangour, the dust, and the heat, since all these things are subject to oblivion. In *Puck of Pook's Hill*, the poem 'Cities and Thrones and Powers', which prefaces one of the Roman Wall stories, does more than suggest that we enjoy an illusion of permanence because this is necessary to existence. Men are as 'blind' and as 'bold' as the flowers :

This season's daffodil,  
She never hears,  
What change, what chance, what chill,  
Cut down last year's :  
But with bold countenance,  
And knowledge small,  
Esteems her seven days' continuance  
To be perpetual.

Again in *Debits and Credits* the Horace Ode called 'Survival' tells us that :

. . . Of deeds outshining stars,  
No word or voice remains.

Yet furthest times receive  
And to fresh praise restore,  
Mere flutes that breathe at eve,  
Mere seaweed on the shore.

At the end of the question is asked : ' Which greater God than all Imposed the amazing doom ' that makes even gods make room for other gods. All our pomps of to-day will no doubt in due course be one with Nineveh and Tyre, but the smaller things will remain, the smoke of sacrifice, a chosen myrtle-wreath, ' the smell of the wattle by Lichtenberg ', or finally, ' the unconquerable grass '.

For across all Kipling's zest of life, all the satisfaction at man's moral grandeur in humility, and immense interest in human achievement, there runs a curious streak of disillusion. Take for example the poem of ' The Four Angels ' in *Actions and Reactions*, with its symbol of the apple tree as man's happiness. The last stanza reads :

As Adam was a-working outside of Eden-Wall  
He used the Earth, he used the Seas, he used the Air and all ;  
Till out of black disaster  
He arose to be the master  
Of Earth and Water, Air and Fire,  
But never reached his heart's desire !  
(The Apple Tree's cut down !)

for whatever efforts man may make, all is in hands other than his. After all, if desire were indeed taken from him, or he attained it, he would no longer act ; and man without action is meaningless. And this links up, we see, with the sense of predestination which a little contradictorily colours



Kipling's intuition of life. At the beginning of *Something of Myself* he tells us :

Looking back in my seventieth year, it seems to me that every card in my working life has been dealt me in such a manner that I had but to play it as it came. Therefore ascribing all good fortune to Allah the Dispenser of Events, I begin :

and the note is not absent from the rest of the book. The sense of being fated is expressed most pithily here and there in poems, notably in 'By the hoof of the wild-goat up-tossed' which precedes the story 'To be Filed for Reference' (*Plain Tales*). He expresses it also through the mouth of some of his characters, again most memorably in a poem, 'McAndrew's Hymn', which appeared in *The Seven Seas*.

## 4

That, then, is the sort of ethos in which he places the men and women who in his stories move and dance and laugh and suffer so vividly, even so extravagantly before us, and the kind of sense of life which animates his poems. But Kipling is by no means all of a piece : the Wesleyan parson in him is offset by the man who loves life in all its forms, and does not measure it by any man-made moral yardstick. Men are as they are, and who shall judge God ? It is curious, too, how in spite of his standards, of having very fierce likes and dislikes amounting to what some might call hideous prejudices, he has a very weak spot in his heart for the failures, the under-dogs, the men whom life has beaten—even for deserters from the army, the 'wilful-missing'—for those who 'go native', for those who are too sensitive. There is already a noticeable pity in the early stories. We remember the boy delicately brought up who shot himself because he took too seriously the mild reproofs made him by his senior officer ('Thrown Away' in *Plain Tales*) ; and in the same book we find 'A Bank Fraud'—the failure of a man promoted to work that was beyond him. This pity, which is perhaps patronage, or anger at unjust waste, later

develops to a real tenderness as in the moving story of 'The Gardener' in *Debits and Credits*, with its reference to the pitying forgiveness of Christ, where the woman visits the war grave of the natural son she has always passed off successfully as her nephew.

For Kipling was not overfond of success. If in theory he loved order and government a little too much, as it may seem to us, he disliked the successful, those who had risen to authority, largely because the orderers and governments that he knew sacrificed by their half-hearted bungling many thousand lives of good decent people. He loathed presumption, the malignant stupidity exhibited by little gods in minor positions, and these are the victims of his most boisterously farcical stories. He destroys with laughter the petty country squire, the pompous politician, the evil-thinking schoolmaster, the upstart landowner so vastly inferior to the yeoman or peasant he imagines he rules : all are shrivelled by his scathing hilarity. He hated all forms of snobbery, and he was always on the side of the person who had to endure.

Moreover it is most significant that, as he attained his own wisdom, he seemed most to ponder the extent to which the human being could endure without collapsing ; or, to put it differently, he explored the limits beyond which no renewal of the spirit is possible. It is true that he treated the theme in the early stories, but there it remains undeveloped. We find it in 'The End of the Passage' (*Life's Handicap*), the story of a man broken by strain who commits suicide from fear of the phantoms he sees : or in the story of the scholar who ends up as a bazaar wastrel ; or later in the tale of the lighthouse keeper, 'A Disturber of Traffic' (*Many Inventions*), who became crazed through loneliness, and whose 'head began to feel streaky from looking at the tides so long'. The titles of his latest books—*Actions and Reactions*, *Debits and Credits*, *Limits and Renewals*—were brilliantly chosen to define the subject matter of the bulk of the tales, and reveal Kipling's preoccupations in his later days. With the

title-subjects of his two last works we are back again in the little house at Southsea. Finally, in a poem, 'Hymn of the Breaking Strain', written in 1935, and to be found in the 1946 Definitive Edition of his verse, he broke out

The careful text-books measure  
    (Let all who build beware)  
The load, the shock, the pressure  
    Material can bear. . . .

But, in our daily dealing  
    With stone and steel, we find  
The Gods have no such feeling  
    Of justice toward mankind.  
To no set gauge they make us—  
    For no laid course prepare—  
And presently o'ertake us  
    With loads we cannot bear :  
    *Too merciless to bear.*

But he ended the poem with a note of Stoic pride that men, in serving the 'veiled and secret Power', 'in spite of being broken, because of being broken . . . stand up and build anew'.

And since this seems to enshrine an old Stoicism, it would be as well here to draw attention to Kipling's modernity. Many of the stories in the later books, for example, hinge upon psycho-analysis, and the curing of terrors or obsessions by revealing their cause, more particularly those brought by the war. It was at this point of his development, indeed, that his notorious sympathy with men of action deepened to a profounder understanding, a reaching out to the realms that are within the mysteries. Now he came to realize as he had never before done, at what cost to the spirit physical action has to be performed. Those were the limits man was ever loosing himself against ; and what Kipling now sought for was the spring of renewal, a rebirth which could be accepted only as a kind of grace. With what passionate understanding he worked this out can be seen in many of the things he wrote after he lost his son early



in 1915 at the Battle of Loos. In these the theme is handled very differently from its earlier treatment in the famous if a little sentimental tale 'The Brushwood Boy' (*The Day's Work*). And from now on his favourite, ever recurring symbol, is the doctor, the healer—of the sickness of the spirit as well as of the body.

## Part II

### THE WRITER

#### I

Kipling was a born writer : his headmaster was aware of it, and the poems he wrote at school which his mother collected, are further witness. He was richly endowed with two of the qualities which made him a superb craftsman : the first, an inexhaustible curiosity about things, and how events happen ; the second an integrity as to his art, a devotion like a devotion to truth. And besides these he had the born writer's love of words, an innate skill in their use, and a pressing desire to do something with them. But his apprenticeship to the craft came in two newspaper offices in India, where he laboured for six and a half years. Behind him he had a happy and cultivated home, in front of him the whole kaleidoscopic panorama of an India as it would appeal to a boy of seventeen who is, nevertheless, as a newspaper man, let into mysteries of how people behave, how countries are governed, how things are done. At Simla he 'saw and heard the machinery of administration stripped bare'. It all went to his head a little, because he was a man of immense vitality—as all creative artists must be—and an almost exaggerated sense of humour. Verse and tales alike came abundantly from his pen, but, with considerable reading behind him, he knew that craftsmanship was of the first importance ; with his father's precepts and example to help

him, he realized that a man's integrity depends upon his loyalty to his task.

That was always his creed. The god he most worshipped among the many gods of his pantheon, was the one to whom he could say (*Envoy to Life's Handicap*)

Who, lest all thoughts of Eden fade,  
Bringst Eden to the craftsman's brain—  
Godlike to muse o'er his own Trade  
And manlike stand with God again !

So as he toiled in the sweltering offices he brooded upon his art, working hard, he tells us in *Something about Myself*, for a certain 'economy of implication'. He goes on :

... I made my own experiments in the weights, colours, perfumes, and attributes of words in relation to other words, either as read aloud so that they may hold the ear, or, scattered over the page, draw the eye. There is no line of my verse or prose which has not been mouthed till the tongue has made all smooth, and memory, after many recitals, has mechanically slipped the grosser superfluities.

That reveals where Kipling is chiefly a stylist, in the relation of words more than in that of paragraphs or scenes. As an example, rather than quote the glorious tapestries of the Indian scene in *Kim*, or any obvious visual triumphs, or the creative realization of machinery in 'The Devil and the Deep Sea' (*The Day's Work*), it may be interesting to quote a passage descriptive of sound. It comes in one of the comic sea-stories, 'Their Lawful Occasions' (*Traffics and Discoveries*) where Kipling is uneasily sinking to sleep in a bunk in a torpedo boat, 'next the quivering steel wall' :

... The sea, sliding over 267's skin, worried me with importunate, half-caught confidences. It drummed tackily to gather my attention, coughed, spat, cleared its throat, and, on the eve of that portentous communication, retired up stage as a multitude whispering. Anon I caught the tramp of armies afoot, the hum of crowded cities awaiting the event. . . .

It may be a little reminiscent in the last phrase of a dream passage of De Quincey ; but then Kipling is full of literary



allusions, some recondite—and the reference serves only to counterpoint the passage. In the morning when he goes on deck he sees :

... such waves as I had often watched contemptuously from the deck of a ten thousand ton liner. They shouldered our little hull sideways and passed, scalloped and splayed out, towards the coast, carrying our white wake in loops along their hollow backs. . . .

If you too cannot now visualize that, words have no meaning, or you have never been to sea.

Confessedly he could not make plots, construct in the grand way ; but, given his intuitions, and his mastery over the word, his short stories carry a depth of implication which make them, in his mature phase, far more than anecdotes or clever sidelights. A notable instance is 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (*Wee Willie Winkie*) a tale in which an extraordinary atmosphere is created, as though all humanity were trapped in life. R. G. Collingwood, in his book on aesthetics, rightly classified him among the magical artists, those who use their art to evoke and canalize emotions ; and it was because Kipling was in touch with the deepest and most primitive emotions that he was at once popular with all except the aesthetes, who murmured, 'It's human (or clever), but is it art ?' What gives him universal value is his insatiable curiosity about ordinary men and common things. In the club at Lahore of which he became a member at seventeen, he eagerly listened to men discussing their workaday jobs ; at Simla he was enthralled at seeing the jobs from a different point of view : while at both places he met the idle gossip of social intercourse, and realized its boredom and its excitements, its petty bitterness and its heroism. In the fort at Lahore he met his three soldiers, the immortals, Mulvaney, Learoyd, and Ortheris ; and everywhere in India, in the bazaars, on the teeming roads, on the slopes of the Himalayas, and in the Native States, he met the incredible diversity of creatures which go to make up India.

His first stories were published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, short feuilletons covering a breathtaking variety of ground, all very skilful, some admirable, some brash and even rather vulgar with the vulgarity of the schoolboy who thinks he understands a great deal, and is very 'knowing'. Yet the moment he speaks of any real sorrow or blackness (he himself knew of the deep abyss of suicidal depression where a man has to face himself alone) he becomes the really penetrative writer. The little delicate feelings he would have nothing to do with, as being apt to lead to self-pity; but he dealt unashamedly with the primitive emotions of mankind, the mystico-religious as well as the animal.

In one sense, making allowance for development and ever-increasing depth of sympathy, all Kipling's stories have much the same quality. His early ones suffer perhaps from too mechanical a structure, too evident a twist—the defects rather than the virtues of the Maupassant method. His characterization however is always beautifully clear, in his immature years brilliantly etched in by description, later on fully modelled by the phrases and gestures of the people themselves. Again, the stories are in a sense all 'adventure' stories, in which the reader is at exactly the right distance from the events, coolly observing them, but not too coolly, identifying himself, but not too closely, whether in glory or excitement, in suffering or pity, with one or other of the characters.

His deepest sympathies were already exhibited in his *Soldiers Three*, which appeared on the railway bookstalls in India in the late 'eighties. Stories about these characters recur from time to time. All three are men who have suffered, who have experienced the position where a man has to fight out alone the battle for his self-respect and his desire to live. But Kipling was intent to tell the truth about mankind, and it is not all very agreeable. In that great tale 'On Greenhow Hill' (*Life's Handicap*) when Learoyd tells the story of his love-affair, and how at one moment he might have killed his rival, 'The thick lips curled back over

the yellow teeth, and the flushed face was not pretty to look upon'. Kipling was never of the opinion that man was wholly pretty, and on this occasion the three men spoke in whispers, 'for the stillness of the wood and the desire of slaughter lay heavy upon them'. Here again he was out of sympathy with the liberalism of his day, as is clear from such a remark as :

. . . The raw fact of life is that mankind is just a little lower than the angels, and the conventions are based on the fact in order that men may become angels. But if you begin . . . by the convention that men are angels they will assuredly become bigger beasts than ever.

Kipling himself to some extent shared the primitive passions he described in his soldiers : yet his hatred of Germans on account of the first world war is not altogether revengeful blood-lust as many suppose. It is to some extent based on justice. 'There *must* be a right and wrong to things', one of the characters in 'A Friend of the Family' (*Debits and Credits*) remarks : 'It can't all be kiss-an'-make-friends, no matter what you do.' Further, as a lover of wayward freedom he feared democracy, being convinced that the tyranny of the many was the worst of all tyrannies. How far he was right may be left for the student of the first half of this century to decide.

## 2

As we have seen, Kipling from the very beginning introduced his main themes : but they deepened with experience. It took him some time to vary his symbols, for although he was in India in his youth for less than seven years, and returned there only for one short visit, for a long time India gave him much of his material. In London he published his *Plain Tales*, *Life's Handicap*, *Wee Willie Winkie*, all of them mainly about India. In America, after his marriage, he published first *Many Inventions*, where India occupies only a small space. Then, however, came the *Jungle Books*.



And after his return to England in 1896, *The Day's Work* still contains India ; and then in 1901 he evolved *Kim*, that imperishable picture, or rather pictures, of India as it was, strung on a somewhat flimsy secret-service tale, and bound into a unity by the touching story of the love of Kim and the Lama. With the exception of *Stalky and Co.*, where he returns to school memories, it is only in his last two volumes of stories that there is no tale of India. Yet it was as early as the mid-'nineties that Kipling found a new purpose in his writing, which was, not to glorify the British Empire—he was always its sternest critic—but to interpret it to the English, make them, indeed, aware of its existence, and of their responsibilities towards it. Later, especially after the death of a much loved daughter, he found the themes which deal with the hidden recesses of man's being. Then we get the psychological and semi-mystic themes, expressed sometimes in fables of the Heavens ; sometimes in stories of healing, which touch upon the theme of strain ; sometimes in fanciful stories such as 'They' (*Traffics and Discoveries*). In the last tale in his last volume he seems almost to come to a final statement of his position. In this story, 'Uncovenanted Mercies', the Heavenly Powers interfere with earthly doings, and towards the end of the tale the passage occurs :

'There !' said Satan. 'You've seen a full test for Ultimate Breaking Strain.'

'But now ?' Gabriel demanded.

'Why do you ask ?'

'Because it was written : "*Even Evil itself shall pity.*"'

Kipling was developing to the end of his life : and in his later years, having after the manner of men fought with beasts at Ephesus (the reference to 1 Corinthians xv. 32 occurs in more than one story), he seemed more and more to wonder what this would advantage him if the dead rise not.

But in the meantime, after his return to England, Kipling had discovered his own country, and entered upon what for him was a perpetual voyage of exciting exploration, not

only as to the England of his day, but of the enthralling past. This led him to the development of his amazing historical faculty which scholars wonder at, and he produced not only the enchantingly vivid stories of *Puck o' Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, but also the Roman and other tales in later books, such as 'The Church at Antioch' and 'The Manner of Men', both of them in *Limits and Renewals*. His three final volumes are extraordinarily rich. All Kipling's experience of the way things are done in the world, his creative imagination, the maturing of his own emotions as a result of his deep personal experiences, and his practised skill in writing, came together to produce an astonishing fusion of symbol and material. The romantic element which runs strongly through all his work, in the earlier phases as physical adventure such as we are superbly given in 'The Man who would be King' (*Wee Willie Winkie*), is later diverted to the spiritual adventure of 'A Madonna of the Trenches' (*Debits and Credits*): it develops from the schoolboy fun of 'Judson and the Empire' (*Many Inventions*) to the grimmer justiciary of 'Sea Constables' (*Debits and Credits*), a story about 'neutrals' who trade meanly in death and betrayal. But his main characters throughout have a rich, superabundant humanity, usually articulate. He can be simple as in the charming 'Finances of the Gods' (*Life's Handicap*), or work with a terrifying complexity as in 'Unprofessional' (*Limits and Renewals*).

So far, little has been said about Kipling's comic writing. ~| Laughter for Kipling was an essential element of living, and equal in value with work; but we may well sometimes feel that with him the laughter is excessive. Too often do we find men clinging helplessly to each other through laughter: too readily do they weep the agonized tears of mirth. Nevertheless, 'Brugglesmith' (*Many Inventions*), 'The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat' (*A Diversity of Creatures*), 'Aunt Ellen' (*Limits and Renewals*) can be enjoyed as sheer high farce. They make no pretence to realism, and cannot be 'undoctored incidents'. We might

think that Kipling was finding a balance to the horror and the void, except that we know that as a young man he was renowned for healthy mirth ; or seeking release from the prison of thought, but that many of the tales have a moral purpose.

But if the comic stories are the least realistic of all, the characters, as always, are perfectly clearly set before us ; they can be recognized, classified, not only as types but as individuals, who are unrealistic only because they are so gloriously and expressively wordy. In their way, these stories are as much ' adventures ' as the others, the characters in them as incurably romantic, that is, holding by values that are not the ' useful ' ones in the flat world of every day. They are none the less actual for that. Moreover his sea-stories—those which centre round the inimitable Pyecroft—contain more than an element of criticism. They are Kipling's revolt against the stuffily moral, the ordinary, against the subservience to the code of ' things that are not done ' (which are not the same as things outside the Law). At the head of the story ' Steam Tactics ' (*Traffics and Discoveries*) there is a poem ' The Necessitarian ' :

I know not in whose hands are laid  
To empty upon earth  
From unsuspected ambushade  
The very Urns of Mirth. . . .

the poem concluding :

Yet it may be, on wayside jape,  
The selfsame Power bestows  
The selfsame power as went to shape  
His Planet or His Rose.

Laughter, for Kipling, was not Satanic : it was holy and healing. His laughter is also very infectious, and it is an agonizing test of self-control to read his ludicrous tales aloud.

### 3

It will have been noticed that to illustrate most of Kipling's characteristics, quotations have been taken from



poems. This is not the place to make an extensive analysis of his verse, but it is time to claim for Kipling the status of a good, a very good, poet, not merely as a hymnologist and ballad writer—though, to be sure, to be good at those branches proclaims the very good poet—but far more widely. Yet just as it is difficult to place him as a prose-writer in his period, so is it difficult to assess his position as a poet; he does not fit easily into any category. We can be certain only that he has done in verse what could not be done in prose, and in a way that nobody else has done. He was a master of versification, and it is clear that he had deeply studied the sixteenth and seventeenth century poets. Much admittedly is jingle; but he can handle all sorts of forms, all sorts of metres; while his rhythms are complex and inventive, sometimes indeed subtle—points which this essay has already perhaps sufficiently made plain. Where his rhythms are obvious and plangent, this is intentional, as in 'Boots', where the tramp of wearied feet marching in army boots is set dully vibrating in our ears. At all events he is at home in the heroic couplet, common measure, the ballad form, the sestina, the English Sapphic, the iambic measure or a rollicking anapaest, the octosyllable, or the sixteener; free verse or a version of the *terza rima*, the seventeenth century stanza or an imitation of Swinburne; there is even an adaptation of a little-known poem from Quarles's *Shepherd's Oracle* (1633) ('Song of the Old Guard' in *Traffics and Discoveries*) where he turns an anti-prelatical song into an anti-War Office jibe. In 'McAndrew's Hymn' he uses his notorious and uncanny knowledge of technical matters to illustrate his sense of predestination, and of the 'appointed time', in verse that reminds us of Southwell's *Burning Babe* (c. 1590). This remarkable dramatic monologue opens:

Lord, Thou hast made this world below the shadow of a dream,  
 An', taught by time, I tak' it so—exceptin' always Steam.  
 From coupler-flange to spindle-guide I see Thy Hand, O God—  
 Predestination in the stride o' yon connectin'-rod.

John Calvin might ha' forged the same—enormous, certain,  
slow—

Ay, wrought it in the furnace-flame—my 'Institutio.' . . .

Later, after commenting on the mean idea of romance held  
by First Class passengers, the old Scots engineer goes on :

I'm sick of all their quirks an' turns—the loves and doves they  
dream—

Lord, send a man like Robbie Burns to sing the Song o' Steam !

To match wi' Scotia's noblest speech yon orchestra sublime

Whaurto—uplifted like the Just—the tail-rod marks the time.

The crank-throws give the double-bass, the feed-pump sobs and  
heaves,

And now the main eccentrics start their quarrel on the sheaves :

Her time, her own appointed time, the rocking link-head bides,

Till—hear that note?—the rod's return whings glimmerin'  
through the guides. . . .

Here, for the first time perhaps, machinery is caught up in  
the poetical use of language.

It is sometimes said that Kipling's poetry is the poetry of  
statement, as though it had no overtones, no quality of  
evocation. The 'statement' is there, certainly, but its  
function is not so simple as the phrase implies. You might  
at first reading think that you are being given only statement  
or description, but you soon find that the rhythm, the word-  
colour, the primary imagery, is immensely evocative.  
Take one of his last poems, in *Limits and Renewals*, the  
'Song of Seventy Horses' :

Once again the Steamer at Calais—the tackles

Easing the car-trays on to the quay. Release her !

Sign—refill, and let me away with my horses

(Seventy Thundering Horses !)

Slow through the traffic, my horses ! It is enough—it is  
France !

*Whether the throat-closing brick-fields by Lille, or her pavées*

*Endlessly ending in rain between beet and tobacco ;*

*Or that wind we shave by—the brutal North-Easter,*

*Rasping the newly dinged Somme.*

*(Into your collars, my horses !)* It is enough—it is France !



*Whether the dappled Argonne, the cloud-shadows packing  
 Either horizon with ghosts ; or exquisite, carven  
 Villages hewn from the cliff, the torrents behind them  
 Feeding their never-quenched lights.  
 (Look to your footing, my horses !)* *It is enough—it is France !*

*Whether that gale where Biscay jammed in the corner  
 Herds and heads her seas at the Landes, but defeated  
 Bellowing smokes along Spain, till the uttermost headlands  
 Make themselves dance in the mist.  
 (Breathe—breathe deeply, my horses !)* *It is enough—it is France !*

*Whether the broke, honey-hued, honey-combed limestone  
 Cream under white-hot sun ; the rosemary bee-bloom  
 Sleepily noisy at noon and, somewhere to Southward,  
 Sleepily noisy, the Sea.  
 (Yes, it is warm here, my horses !)* *It is enough—it is France !*

*Whether the Massif in Spring, the multiplied lacets  
 Hampered by slips or drifts ; the gentians, under  
 Turbaned snow, pushing up the heaven of Summer  
 Though the stark moors lie black.  
 (Neigh through the icicled tunnels ; ‘ It is enough—it is France ! ’)*

If that seems to some tastes too much like ‘ rhetoric ’, that is, the conscious use of language, a simpler poem may be taken from *Sea Warfare* (1914–18), ‘ My Boy Jack ’ :

‘ Have you any news of my boy Jack ? ’

*Not this tide*

‘ When d’you think that he’ll come back ? ’

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide*

‘ Has anyone else had word of him ? ’

*Not this tide.*

*For what is sunk will hardly swim*

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide. . . .*

Certainly he can put metrically what you may if you like call a statement, but much of his poetry is sheer incantation or charm-writing. Different again are the famous rhetorical appeals such as ‘ Reccessional ’, that almost pontifically phrased warning to the British Empire ; and the

1914 call, 'For all we have and are'. Here, as a contrast, we might quote a portion of 'A Recantation', where he writes to Lyde of the Music Halls, whose art he had judged 'o'er blown and over-bold', but who was the comfort of his son in the war, the son Kipling lost: the boy had had gramophone records of Lyde's (Marie Lloyd?) songs, and her picture pinned up in his dug-out at the front. When the young men came home on leave, they went to the music hall, and adored her, making mirth in 'Rome': 'therefore', Kipling goes on:

Therefore, I humble, join the hosts,  
Loyal and loud, who bow  
To thee as Queen of Song—and ghosts,  
For I remember how

Never more rampant rose the Hall  
At thy audacious line  
Than when the news came in from Gaul  
Thy son had—followed mine.

But thou didst hide it in thy breast  
And, capering, took the brunt  
Of blaze and blare, and launched the jest  
That swept next week the Front. . . .

and he does homage because she ignored her own feelings, and remembered that power had been given her, not for goods or gear, but for The Thing. It is a moving poem; but—the poetry of statement? Yes, if you like. Then so are most of Horace's poems and Milton's sonnets.

Kipling was at once hailed by the wider commonalty of English readers, and by, here and there, men who could recognize genius when they saw it; but the 'cultured' as a whole have been slow to come to an appreciation of his worth. In France his popular acceptance may have been for the wrong reasons—his 'exoticism' for instance, or, more justifiably, for the charming myths he invented for children in *Just-so Stories*—yet the really great men of letters have from the first acknowledged his stature. It was

not for nothing that Jaques Rivière and Alain Fournier used to write to each other about him. No one would claim that he ranks among the great artists of the first towering order either in prose or poetry ; but he was an intuitive as well as a markedly able man, a man of wide and extremely vivid sympathies for individuals, himself a distinctive individual, and a very great craftsman indeed. He could give life to the word. You may not respond to all that he has to say, but you cannot ignore him. If he has not altered literature, he has at least made a permanent contribution to it, for he releases and nourishes not only the mind but the vision which is beyond knowledge ; and he often states in memorable words the commonest and deepest feelings of the great mass of mankind, when these have got to the stage of being expressible in myth.

# RUDYARD KIPLING

## A

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